

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

221248Z Jul 05

ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	USNW-00	A-00	CIAE-00	INL-00
	DODE-00	DOEE-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EUR-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00
	M-00	AC-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-00	OIG-00	OMB-00
	PA-00	MCC-00	PER-00	PM-00	GIWI-00	PRS-00	ACE-00
	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00	TRSE-00	FMP-00	BBG-00
	R-00	ECA-00	IIP-00	SCRS-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-00	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/001W	

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FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2042
INFO AMEMBASSY ABUJA
AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY KAMPALA
AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

UNCLAS NDJAMENA 001165

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, DRL, INR, LONDON AND PARIS FOR
AFRICA-WATCHERS, AF/PD (DWHITMAN)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [CD](#)

SUBJECT: PRESS FREEDOM AND THE BATTLE OF THE SPEECHES

SENSITIVE

REF: NDJAMENA 864, 946

1. (SBU) Summary: The government of Chad has continued to harass and imprison journalists, despite pressure from the United States, and outcry from the local and international press and groups like Reporters Without Borders. Two journalists have been sentenced to three months and three years in prison, respectively. Two others are now under threat of imprisonment. The Ambassador's Independence Day speech received massive media coverage, as did the 14th of July speech given by the French Ambassador. The general perception in the independent press is that the United States supports press freedoms, while France has clearly sided with the government of Chad in punishing what the government media views as irresponsible journalism. End Summary

UPDATE ON ARRESTS

2. (SBU) Al-Hadj Garond Djarma and Samory Ngaradoumb of the independent L'Observateur have both been sentenced to prison terms. Ngaradoumb received a three-month sentence and must pay a 100,000 FCFA (\$183.00 USD) fine. Djarma received a three-year sentence and must pay 1,000,000 FCFA (\$1,830.00 USD). Both were charged with defamation and inciting racial hatred. A third journalist, Michael Didama of Le Temps, is awaiting his trial date of August 1. The pro-government paper Le Progs reported on July 20 that a fourth journalist, Mrs. Sy Koumbo Singa Gali of L'Observateur, will also face prosecution for publishing an interview with Djarma in which he claimed that his arrest was "Jandjaweed trickery."

MEDIA REACTION TO AMBASSADOR'S REMARKS

3. (SBU) The Ambassador's Independence Day remarks received huge coverage in the press. Public Affairs staff with years of experience cannot remember a speech that received so much attention. The speech was reprinted in its entirety in three French-language papers and two Arabic-language papers. At least four local radio stations played large excerpts of the speech, some with added commentary. TeleTchad, the government-owned television station, also had a lengthy report that focused more on the event than the content of the speech. Opinions on the speech were generally divided along pro-government and opposition lines. The pro-government press chose to largely ignore the content of the speech, focusing instead on the Embassy's recent equipment donations to the press. The independent N'Djamena Bi-Hebdo published a large excerpt of the speech, then stating, "could one find a more

severe criticism of the policies undertaken by the Deby regime?" Commenting on France's role in Chad, Bi-Hebdo continued, "the language of frankness and truth [in Ambassador Wall's speech] that should inform our relations has never come from the French authorities, who have instead encouraged () the autocrats of N'Djamena."

FRENCH AMBASSADOR'S SPEECH

14. (SBU) France's Ambassador to Chad Jean Pierre Bercot spoke to an audience of several hundred at the annual celebration of Bastille Day on July 14th. More than half of the ten-minute speech was devoted to a discussion of the press. Bercot began by detailing the large amount of aid that France has given to the Chadian press (200 million FCFA, or \$370,000.00 USD, over the last four years). Bercot then explained at length exactly what type of free

press France will support in Chad: "Yes, France supports and will support an investigative press, and not a manipulative press that confuses facts and commentary. Yes France supports and will support a free and independent press, and not a partisan press, allied with specific

interest groups. Yes, France supports and will support a press that respects Chadian national dignity, and not a press that seeks to dirty, by any means, the external image of Chad and of Chadians."

PRESS REACTION TO BERCOT'S SPEECH

15. (SBU) Bercot's remarks were met with general outrage in the independent press, where they were viewed as supporting the government's campaign of harassment and arrest of journalists. Bi-Hebdo called Bercot "a cold monster," while the headline of the July 21st issue of the independent Le Temps wonders whether he is an "ambassador or colonial governor." In their by-line, Le Temps accuses the French ambassador of being "visibly jealous of the very lovely friendship that has developed between the U.S. Embassy and the Chadian press", accusing Bercot of transforming the Bastille day celebration into a "forum for organizing a trial of Chadian journalists based on assumptions rather than facts." Surprisingly, even the pro-government Le Progrès printed a very balanced account of Bercot's speech, and included several opposition opinions in their analysis. However, radio FM Liberte has received a letter from the High Council for Communications demanding that the station stop airing criticism of the French Ambassador's speech.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) The independent press seems to view the U.S. as one of their most ardent defenders during the recent spate of trials and arrests, especially since the Ambassador's Independence Day remarks coincided with a \$60,000 USD equipment giveaway to the press public and private.

Chadians are often quick to criticize their former colonial leaders, and they jumped on the chance to attack Bercot for his comments. The French are normally viewed as pro-regime by the independent press, and Bercot's remarks have done much to strengthen this view. The U.S., which is now seen as a strong friend of press freedoms in Chad, also risks being viewed as anti-regime or anti-Deby, both by the government and in the pro-government press.

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